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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD  
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL  
PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
ROME FOR MFO  
E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Mideast

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Key stories in the media:  
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All media reported on, and the major newspapers bannered, Monday's demonstration in Beirut and the resignation of Omar Karameh's pro-Syrian government. Israel Radio cited the USG's overt satisfaction over the development.

Israel Radio reported that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, traveling to the London Meeting on Supporting the Palestinian Authority, warned Palestinian leaders on Monday that they are required to deal with terrorism. Ha'aretz reported on, and its English Ed. bannered, a document it obtained -- the final statement to be issued at today's London conference, which will reportedly not mention terrorism and refers only in vague terms to Palestinian security commitments, as the Palestinians persuaded the British hosts to leave out any mention of a Palestinian commitment to act against the launching of Qassam rockets or armed attacks on Israelis from the territories. According to Ha'aretz, the PA does promise "to restore and revive the lines of communication with the Israeli security establishment on security issues and will seek to strengthen them in the process. Jerusalem Post quoted a senior PA official in Ramallah as saying that the PA is planning to ask for USD 500 million in financial aid at the conference, and that the money is needed to rebuild infrastructure and boost the economy to strengthen PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas's administration. Israel Radio quoted Abbas as saying, before the conference, that the London conference is the prelude to an international peace conference that will take place soon. The station quoted Abbas at saying in his opening speech at the conference that the Palestinians have proven that they are entitled to a state. Israel Radio quoted Israeli defense sources as saying that security cooperation with the Palestinians will resume next week, when Abbas returns from London.

Ha'aretz quoted an Israeli source as saying that the U.S., which was "burned" when it sent funds to the Palestinians under Arafat's regime, is now particularly careful. The same article mentions the importance of U.S. Jewry in the restoration of the U.S. Congress's transfer of foreign assistance to the Palestinians, as promised by President Bush.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that the State Department's 2005 Human Rights Report voices criticism of human rights conditions in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Israel. Ha'aretz says that Israel is charged with holding thousands of Palestinian prisoners without trial, and with failing to act properly regarding the improvement of discrimination against Israeli Arabs and the abuse of foreign workers. Hatzofe quoted a senior IAF officer as saying Monday that the Iranian threat is high on the IAF's list of priorities. Jerusalem Post printed a similar story.

All media reported that security forces discovered and destroyed a booby-trapped car in the Jenin area on Monday. It is believed to have been assembled by the Islamic Jihad cell behind Friday's suicide bombing in Tel Aviv. Depending on reports, the bomb weighed 200 to 500 kg. Leading media reported that two civilian security guards were wounded last night next to the construction site of the separation fence in the

Modi'in area.

Leading media reported that the Foreign Ministry went on the diplomatic offensive against Syria Monday by presenting evidence linking it to Friday's terror attack in Tel Aviv to ambassadors and officials from UN Security Council member countries. The ministry is also sending defense officials to London, Paris, and Washington to make Israel's case against Syria.

Israel Radio reported that the IDF plans to accelerate the disengagement move, completing it by September 1. The radio reported that the operation's codename was changed from "Shevet Ahim" ("Brothers Sit Together"), which was contested by the Right, to "Disengagement Plan." Yediot reported that cadet soldiers from elite units will take part in the evacuation. Leading media reported that the chairman of the Likud Central Committee, Minister-Without-Portfolio Tzachi Hanegbi, reached a compromise with the Likud "rebels" on a pro-referendum proposal that would not embarrass PM Sharon for Thursday's committee meeting.

Leading media reported that at a Likud Knesset faction meeting on Monday, Sharon lashed out against the persistent intervention of High Court Justices in the determination of the route of the West Bank separation fence. Leading media reported that on Monday, former deputy chief of staff Maj. Gen. (Res.) Uzi Dayan, who currently heads the Public Council for a Security Fence, placed indirect responsibility for Friday's suicide bombing in PM Sharon. Speaking at the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Dayan said that if construction of the fence had been completed, the terrorist might not have managed to reach Tel Aviv to carry out the attack. Jerusalem Post quoted Chief-of-Staff-designate Dan Halutz as saying before the committee that the IDF will stay positioned in the territory beyond the security fence, and that it is putting a priority on completing the barrier in the Jerusalem area by the end of July. Jerusalem Post reported that British Ambassador to Israel Simon McDonald told the newspaper Monday that Britain protested to Israel last week over the decision to draw Ma'aleh Adumim and its satellite settlements inside the rerouted fence.

Jerusalem Post reported that Jordanian FM Hani Fawzi al-Mulki is slated to arrive in Israel for a visit Saturday evening, the first visit by a Jordanian FM since 2001.

Jerusalem Post reported that the PA's Ministry of Planning hopes to transform the Ganim and Cadim settlements into a campus for a technical college after Israel pulls out of the northern West Bank later this year.

Ha'aretz reported that the defense establishment commission examining the military censor's powers plans to recommend expanding the powers of the censor, according to a document from the commission that was sent to the Press Council's presidium on Monday.

Yediot and Maariv reported that Halutz has named Maj. Gen. Moshe Kaplinsky as his deputy.

Ha'aretz reported that the High Court of Justice ruled Monday that the military investigation into the shooting of International Solidarity Movement (ISM) activist Brian Avery, and American citizen, who was wounded in the face by gunfire in Jenin in April 2003, will be reopened. Jerusalem Post reported that the state "reluctantly" accepted a suggestion by the court to hear testimony about the incident.

Ha'aretz reported on a business administration program at Haifa University, which is attended by Israeli and Palestinian students, and encourages economic cooperation between Israel and the PA.

All media reported on Monday's suicide bombing in the Iraqi town of Hillah.

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Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Intelligence affairs writer Gad Shimron opined on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv: "A large poster of U.S. President George Bush was conspicuously absent in the sea of thousands of Lebanese flags that were raised in the central Beirut square."

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "These are the twilight days of the Syrian political control over Lebanon. The next question will be whether the Syrian establishment will seek to punish the young president for losing Lebanon."

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach opined in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Who would have believed that the road to the liberation of Lebanon would not be paved by international diplomacy but by masses of people who simply are fed up?"

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in Yediot Aharonot: "There can be no doubt that the events currently under way in Lebanon are an earthquake in the Arab world.... [Still,] the pressure on Syria and Iran needs to be maintained at full force."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Palestinians and Lebanese, like Iraqis and Afghans, are not exempt from the human desire for freedom."

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in Ha'aretz: "The same Sharon who wanted to smash Oslo is now imprisoned by its ropes and praying it won't come to an end."

#### Block Quotes:

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#### I. "Bush's Victory"

Intelligence affairs writer Gad Shimron opined on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv (March 1): "A large poster of U.S. President George Bush was conspicuously absent in the sea of thousands of Lebanese flags that were raised in the central Beirut square. There is a clear and direct line that links between the resignation of Omar Karameh's pro-Syrian government and Bush's aggressive policy, which has set the establishment of democracy in the Middle East as one of its declared objectives.... In Beirut, on Monday, for the first time in the history of the Arab nation, a government resigned because of a mass demonstration. So anyone who wants to can keep right on mocking Bush and his abilities to lead the free world. But the wave that was created in April 2003 with the crash of the statue of Saddam Hussein in one of Baghdad's central squares is now arriving, with tsunami force. Ask Omar Karameh, Bashar Assad, Hosni Mubarak and others."

#### II. "Syria Is Losing Control"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 1): "It turned out Monday that Syria can no longer avert the political collapse in Lebanon, and that there was no other choice but to make sacrifices. It is possible that the Karameh resignation last night is only the first in a series of steps Syria will take to satisfy tumultuous Lebanese public opinion -- and to preserve what remains of its stature in Lebanon.... Assad is now in a new and dangerous situation, as far as Syria is concerned. He's been stripped of his exclusive control over Lebanese politics, and the government whose prime minister he appointed has resigned, leaving him with the somewhat nonsensical statement, 'the resignation of the Lebanese government is a domestic Lebanese issue'.... These are the twilight days of the Syrian political control over Lebanon. The next question will be whether the Syrian establishment will seek to punish the young president for losing Lebanon."

#### III. "The Tidings from Beirut"

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach opined in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 1): "[Current events in Lebanon are] the product of the 'zeitgeist': Al-Jazeera, for example, is thought of by the West as an Arab propaganda agent of sorts; but it brings into the Arabs' homes images that raise spirits in a way that dictatorial regimes are hard put to cope with. It is not clear yet how the crisis in Lebanon will be resolved. Whoever dares venture a prediction as to what will happen to the Syrians, Hizbullah and the Israeli interests does so at his own risk, and most of the people prophesizing have met in the past with stinging failure in their previous forecasts of these very same things. For the time being, we can only gaze on in marvel, perhaps even impressed, at a public that is prepared to act -- even at the price of facing a

risk to life. Who would have believed that the road to the liberation of Lebanon would not be paved by international diplomacy but by masses of people who simply are fed up?"

#### IV. "Earthquake"

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in Yediot Aharonot (March 1): "At first glance, this seems to be a 'velvet revolution,' similar to the earthquake that shook eastern Europe in 1989, with the people bringing down a tyrannical government. Indeed, there can be no doubt that the events currently under way in Lebanon are an earthquake in the Arab world. Mass demonstrations of this sort might yet topple the totalitarian regimes in other Arab countries -- and that has elicited almost panicked reactions from Mubarak, Assad and their ilk.... But one needs to bear in mind that the pro-Syrian regime in Lebanon is still intact, and another pro-Syrian government is likely to be formed to replace the one that fell. As such, the turn of events is strongly redolent of a Syrian ploy, yet another Syrian ploy, in hope that the fall of the government in Beirut will appease the masses in the streets and quell the 'independence Intifada' that they declared.... Now that events are in full play and dictators are being hunted, one must not succumb to the temptation to believe in Middle Eastern style ploys of deception. The pressure on Syria and Iran needs to be maintained at full force. In what is an interesting and historic set of circumstances, for the first time since the establishment of the State of Israel, both Israel and the Lebanese street, which longs for a change, are party in a genuine but undeclared partnership. Time will tell whether this partnership will evolve in the future into an openly declared partnership."

#### IV. "Democracy Week"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (March 1): "It is only Tuesday, but it is already a fabulous week for democracy. Yesterday, people power ousted the pro-Syrian puppet government in Beirut. Today, world leaders gather in London to discuss an agenda for Palestinian democratic reforms.... When Yasser Arafat was alive, all we heard was that the alternative to him was Hamas. Now it turns out that the alternative is Abbas, who was elected on an anti-terror platform. It was also not long ago that anyone predicting that the Lebanese people would oust their Syrian oppressors was a hopeless dreamer. The lesson here is that Palestinians and Lebanese, like Iraqis and Afghans, are not exempt from the human desire for freedom. It means that it is right to press Abbas to bring freedom of the press, assembly, and rule of law to his people, and that these rights will be the ultimate guarantor of any future peace with Israel."

#### VI. "Back to Oslo"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in Ha'aretz (March 1): "The attack near the Tel Aviv promenade on Friday night only made tangible the return of the 'spirit of Oslo.' The government refrained from a military reaction and chose to apply 'diplomatic pressure' on Abbas and to suspend a few channels of dialogue with him while distancing the blame to Syria. It was just like Peres' sorry attempt to blame Iran for the wave of bombings in 1996 that brought him down.... Oslo was not the 'peace of the brave' but an agreement by cowards who took into consideration the domestic limits on each of the sides, preferring small, measured steps over 'painful concessions'.... The same Sharon who wanted to smash Oslo is now imprisoned by its ropes and praying it won't come to an end. Like Rabin, Sharon is afraid of steps that move too quickly and is not anticipating any 'end to the conflict.' He continues now from the place where the process stopped before the Intifada, and is hoping to withstand the mounting international pressure to end the conflict, once and for all."

KURTZER